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Notre Dame Magazine

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page 18



NOTRE DAME NEWS

- 3** Notre Dame faces its drinking problem.
- 6** An economist who knows money matters.
- 8** In NITA's courts, only the lawyers are on trial.
- 11** The biotech boom comes to campus.
- 13** "Catholic university" is not a mark of shame.
- 15** Bob Gordon—point man for advanced studies.

ALUMNI SECTION

- 56** Ed Fischer '37 appraises the making of traditions.
- 58** Classnotes and club news.

PERSPECTIVES

- 77** "It was the gun that forced me to understand Lebanon."
- 79** In defense of the Pope.
- 81** In this corrupt world, having babies is an act of faith.
- 84** His father's tailor.

FEATURES

18 In Critical Condition, by James Winters '77
As Father Richard McBrien sees it, serious conflicts in Catholicism centering on power and sex have produced "a real crisis in the priesthood."

24 Where Are the Priests? by Tim Unsworth
As the church runs out of clergy, two remedies—making celibacy optional and ordaining women—seem remote. At the moment.

28 Educating Father, by Robert McClory
At Saint Mary of the Lake, Catholic Theological Union, and Moreau seminaries, the demands of the church are being addressed in individual ways, yet thoughtfully and innovatively.

33 The Man with Five Lives, by Robert Schmuhl '70
At 85, Max Lerner has cut back a bit on lecturing. But his books, newspaper columns, teaching and family life are going strong.

37 'All My Relations,' by Kerry Temple '74
In a land where the Grandfathers dwell, you can touch the spirit that connects all things—earth and sky, two-leggeds and four-leggeds, red man and white.

43 Russia's People of God, by John Klier '66, '68
In the era of *glasnost*, there is breathing space for Christians in the Soviet Union. It may be only temporary.

47 A Sense of Place, a photo essay by William Strode

51 Who Killed JFK? by Vincent P. DeSantis
A quarter of a century later, most Americans still have trouble believing Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unaided, committed "the most shocking single event of our time."

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Who Killed JFK?

A quarter of a century later, most Americans still have trouble believing Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unaided, committed "the most shocking single event of our time." But he did.

by Vincent P. DeSantis

Twenty-five years afterwards, the memory of it still haunts Americans. The tragedy of November 22, 1963, left a vivid mark on U.S. history: Within a few seconds, on a Dallas street, the John F. Kennedy administration of a thousand days came to a stunning end.

Television and news photographs played a major role in fixing the assassination in the national consciousness: We saw Jacqueline Kennedy at Lyndon Johnson's airborne swearing-in, her suit and stockings smeared with her dead husband's blood; we watched as Jack Ruby shoved a gun into suspect Lee Harvey Oswald's abdomen and saw Oswald's face contort as the gun exploded.

A year later, James Reston of *The New York Times* contended that what died in Dallas was not only a president but a promise. Robbed of his years, Kennedy was by then being honored in death as he never was in life. Deprived of the place he sought in history, he was awarded a place in legend.

In the years since 1963, a steady procession of visitors has poured into Dallas—

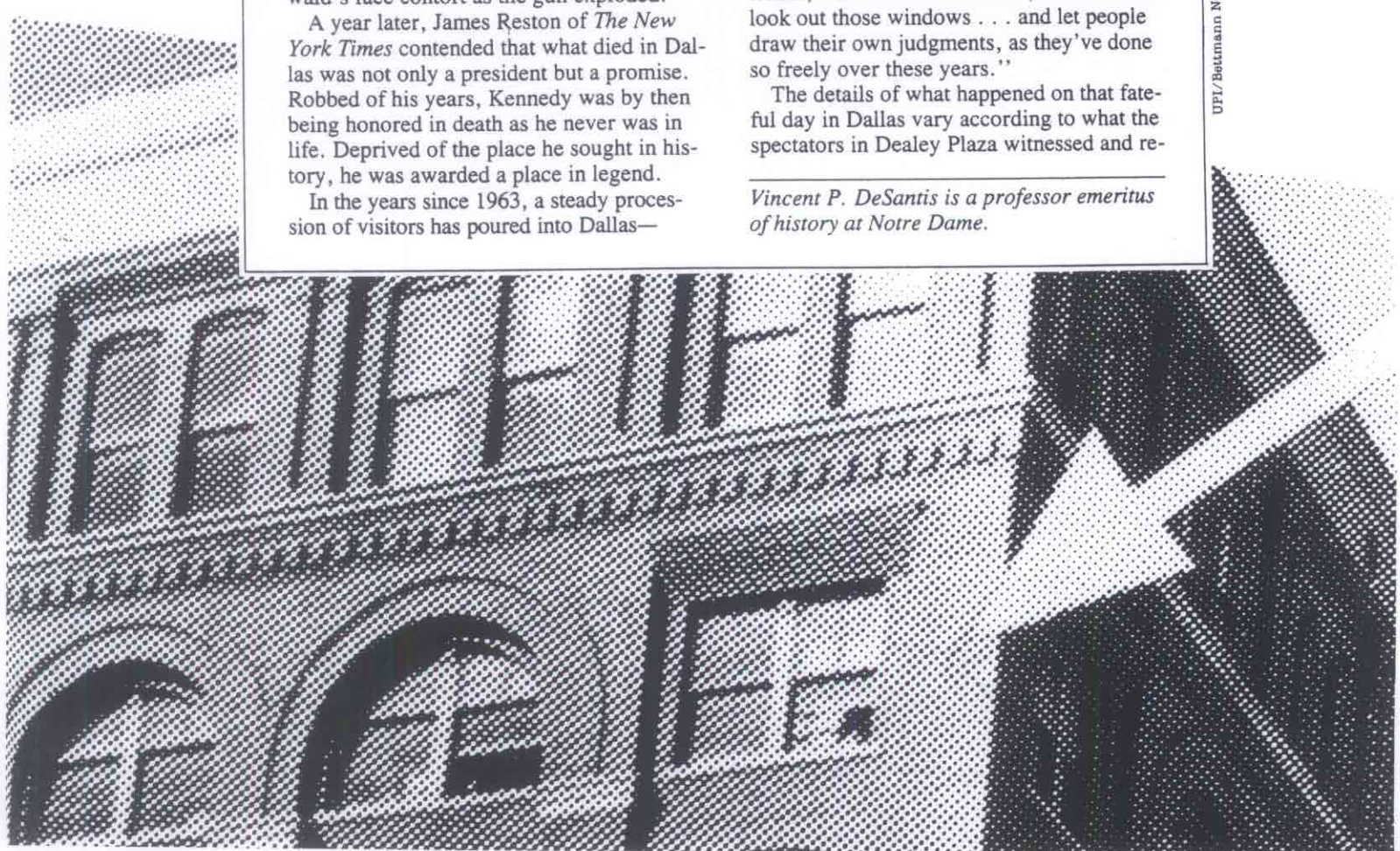
"official and unofficial investigators," wrote one observer, "historians, Boy Scout troops, witch hunters, pilgrims and, for the most part, ordinary Americans. They keep coming—often whole families traveling hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles from other states or nations to view for themselves the site of the most shocking single event of our time. . . . Invariably they point to the sixth-floor window where Oswald stood and squeezed off his first shot. . . ."

For a quarter of a century, the seven-story red brick building known in 1963 as the Texas School Book Depository (and now as the Dallas County Administration Building) has been closed to the public. But it is being opened this year in time for the 25th anniversary. The reason, according to Dallas officials, "is to unlock the door, let the world look out those windows . . . and let people draw their own judgments, as they've done so freely over these years."

The details of what happened on that fateful day in Dallas vary according to what the spectators in Dealey Plaza witnessed and re-

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corded. While the Abraham Zapruder film is the best known photographic evidence of the event, more than 500 photographs and motion pictures are known to have been taken. With so many different eyewitness accounts, it's tempting to agree with the discouraging appraisal of historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., who said, "any historian trying to get to the truth of the Kennedy assassination is bound to sink into a quicksand of suspicions, contradictions, and enigmas."

Still, some things about Kennedy's assassination are reasonably certain. To start with, he did not want to go to Texas that day. "I wish I weren't going," he told Pierre Salinger, his press secretary, but he needed the state's 25 electoral votes in the 1964 election, and he was advised that only he could hold together the warring Democratic party factions in the state. So he went and took Jackie with him.

Dallas was considered a hazardous place for the president to visit. It led the nation in murders per capita (72 percent committed with guns). "It was home to 'Impeach Earl Warren' billboards," wrote one observer, "to John Birchers, Minutemen and Christian Crusaders, to 'K.O. The Kennedys.'" The *Dallas Morning News* had called Kennedy a Judas for his Test Ban Treaty and the Bay of Pigs fiasco. There were thousands of mug-shot handbills in circulation, accusing the president of treason for not invading Cuba and for allowing Adlai Stevenson, the U.S. Representative at the United Nations, to "turn the sovereignty of the United States over to the Communist-controlled United Nations."

A Democratic National Committeeman from Texas had urged the president to cancel the Dallas visit, and an editor in Austin predicted, "He will not get through this without something happening to him." Senator J. William Fulbright told him, "Dallas is a very dangerous place. I wouldn't go there. Don't you go." The Secret Service believed it would be difficult to protect Kennedy in Dallas and thought the Dallas police force was inefficient. They worried about the 20,000 windows overlooking the motorcade's route and about the thousands of people expected to crowd the streets. The presi-

dent, they knew, disliked being shielded by bodyguards and was likely to stop his open-air limousine and get out to shake hands.

Kennedy arrived at the Dallas airport from Fort Worth around 11:30 in the morning, and at noon his motorcade headed for the commercial center of the city. Leading Kennedy's limousine was an escort vehicle, driven by the Dallas police chief, and several police motorcycles. The limousine's driver was Secret Service Agent William Greer, and Agent Roy Kellerman, chief of the Secret Service's White House detail, was next to him. In the rear seat were Kennedy on the right and Jackie on the left; Texas Governor John Connally and his wife, Nellie, sat on jump seats in the mid-section of the car. The 21-car motorcade was escorted by Dallas police officers on motorcycles.

Excited cries and applause greeted the caravan as it moved through Main Street and Houston Street. When Kennedy's limousine turned onto Houston Street and entered Dealey Plaza, an open area on the outskirts of downtown Dallas, Nellie Connally turned to Kennedy and said, "You can't say that Dallas doesn't love you." The president replied, "That's obvious." Then the limousine turned left at an acute angle on the block-long stretch of Elm Street that was flanked on one end by the Texas School Book Depository and on the other by a small hill covered with bushes and surrounded by a 6-foot-high wooden fence, known as the grassy knoll. Elm Street led directly to the freeway and the Trade Mart, where Kennedy was to speak.

Because of the sharp turn, the presidential limousine had to reduce its speed considerably. At that point, it came into the lens of an 8-millimeter Bell and Howell home movie camera held by a New York clothing manufacturer, Abraham Zapruder, who steadily focused on the limousine until it disappeared through an underpass on its way to the freeway. Thus did Zapruder film the assassination.

Within a few seconds after Kennedy's limousine entered Elm Street, when the clock on the big Hertz sign atop the Texas School Book Depository read 12:30 p.m., the first gunfire exploded upon the car. Kennedy grimaced, and his hands reached for his neck. His limousine, which was moving about 11 miles an hour, slowed

down even more and seemed nearly immobilized. The driver, Greer, was looking over his shoulder into the back seat, and the other Secret Service agents were looking about in puzzlement. More shots followed, and the right side of Kennedy's head exploded in a burst of red. Only then did Greer accelerate the car.

United Press International reporter Merriam Smith, who was in the motorcade's press car, reported over his radio-telephone, "Three shots were fired at President Kennedy's motorcade in downtown Dallas." These "three shots" would become the basis of much subsequent controversy.

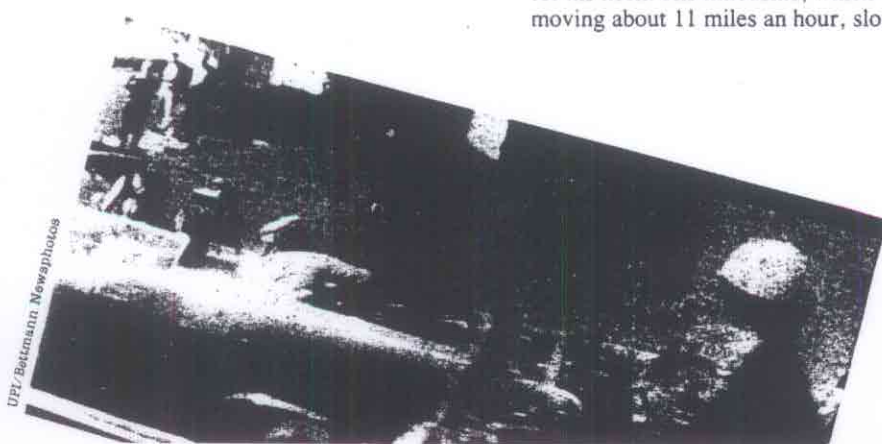
All this took about six seconds, then Greer raced toward Parkland Hospital, four miles away. Surgeons there struggled to save Kennedy, but the massive damage to his head was too much to overcome. One surgeon, Dr. Malcolm Perry, noticing a small hole in Kennedy's throat, believed it to be a bullet entry wound and enlarged it to insert a tracheotomy tube. It was all to no avail. Father Oscar Huber administered the last rites of the Catholic Church, and shortly before 1 o'clock, 30 minutes after the attack, Dr. Kemp Clark pronounced John F. Kennedy dead.

Lyndon Johnson and his entourage, surrounded by Secret Service Agents, left at once for Love Field. Fearful of a plot or even an attempted coup, the Secret Service advised Johnson to fly as soon as possible to Washington. Johnson disliked the idea but, as he himself said, "We don't know whether it's a Communist conspiracy or not." He directed that news of Kennedy's death be withheld until after Air Force One was in the air. Assistant Press Secretary Malcolm Kilduff then told the press that the president was dead.

A local undertaker was asked to bring a hearse and a coffin, but before Kennedy's body could be placed in the hearse to be taken to the airfield, Dr. Earl Rose, Dallas County's medical examiner, appeared at the hospital to claim the body. The assassination of a president was not then a federal crime and, as Rose explained to Kennedy's aides, under Texas law no homicide victim could be removed from the state until an autopsy was performed.

But Kennedy's loyal aides were determined to rush his body to Washington. When Rose blocked the emergency-area doorway, backed by a local magistrate, the Kennedy aides pushed the coffin through, placed it in the hearse and headed for the airfield. When they got there, the aides were unable to locate the catch to release the coffin from the floor of the hearse and had to yank it out. A handle was broken, making the heavy bronze coffin difficult to carry; it had to be bounced and tilted up the ramp into the narrow entrance of the plane.

A body that is going to have an autopsy should be disturbed as little as possible. The surgeons at the Naval Medical Center at Be-



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thesda, Maryland, who later that evening performed the autopsy, had to trace the paths of the assassin's bullets through a body that had been invaded by medical treatment and disarranged by the manner in which it was propelled out of the hospital and into the airplane.

Meanwhile, the Dallas police were questioning eyewitnesses; eventually, more than 190 in Dealey Plaza would give evidence. They offered conflicting accounts of the number of shots fired, of men running out of the Book Depository building down the street or into station wagons, of shots from behind the grassy knoll, above the underpass and so forth.

Dallas motorcycle officer Marrion L. Baker, certain the sniper was on the roof of the depository, rushed into the building and came upon the superintendent, Roy Truly. Together they ran up the steps and reached the second floor 90 seconds after the first shot. Here they saw Oswald entering the lunch room, but Truly identified him as a depository employee. While Truly and Baker continued up toward the roof, a secretary on the second floor saw Oswald walking toward the stairs leading down to the front door of the depository. It was 12:33 p.m.

By 12:34, the police consensus was that the shots had come from the depository building. Soon after, eyewitnesses Howard Brennan and Amos Lee Euins told the police about seeing a gunman in the sixth-floor window. The depository was sealed at 12:44, 14 minutes after the first shot was fired, and a police bulletin went out to all squads describing the suspect in the shooting as "an unknown white male, approximately 30, slender build, height 5 feet 6, weight 165 pounds."

Shortly after 1 o'clock, Roy Truly told police that an employee, Oswald, was missing. At 1:15, about a mile from Oswald's rooming house, Police Officer J.D. Tippit spotted Oswald; he fit the police bulletin's description. Nine eyewitnesses testified that when Tippit got out of his car, Oswald shot Tippit four times with a handgun. Oswald tried to escape but was captured in the nearby Texas Theater; when arrested he said, "Well, it's all over now." At police headquarters he complained of police brutality and claimed he knew nothing about Officer Tippit or the president.

On the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository meanwhile, the police, at about 1:22 p.m., found a sniper's nest made from stacked book cartons. Three used cartridge cases lay on the floor. Behind another stack of book boxes they found a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle with a telescopic sight. A live round was in the chamber. Also found was heavy brown wrapping paper, which investigators surmised had been used to smuggle the rifle into the building. The rifle belonged to Oswald, and his prints were on the boxes at the window and on the

underside of the rifle barrel. Some fibers from his shirt were caught in a crack between the metal plate on the butt end of the rifle and the wooden butt.

Oswald was 24, a professed Marxist, and a former member of the Marine Corps who had qualified as a Sharpshooter with the M-1 rifle. He'd lived in Moscow, where he unsuccessfully tried to become a Soviet citizen. After about 18 months there he became tired of the Soviet system and, with the help of the State Department, returned to the United States with his Russian wife and their baby daughter. In mid-October 1963, he got a job filling orders at the Texas School Book Depository.

The networks identified the suspect at 3:23 p.m., and at 7:10 that evening Oswald was charged with the murder of Officer Tippit. At 1:35 a.m. the next day, November 23, he was charged under Texas state law with the murder of Kennedy. Police said they had an airtight case. Oswald, unable to reach New York lawyer John Abt, who was active in ACLU cases, defended himself before reporters, telling them, "I didn't kill anybody, no sir."

Oswald was to be transferred from the city jail to the county jail at 10 a.m. Sunday, November 24. There was a delay for interrogation. At 11:20, Oswald was brought to the jail basement handcuffed to a detective. A short, stocky man in a snap brim hat suddenly strode from the crowd gathered there and fired a snubnose .38 revolver into Oswald's stomach. The gunman was Jack Ruby, operator of two strip places, a local character who liked to hang around policemen.

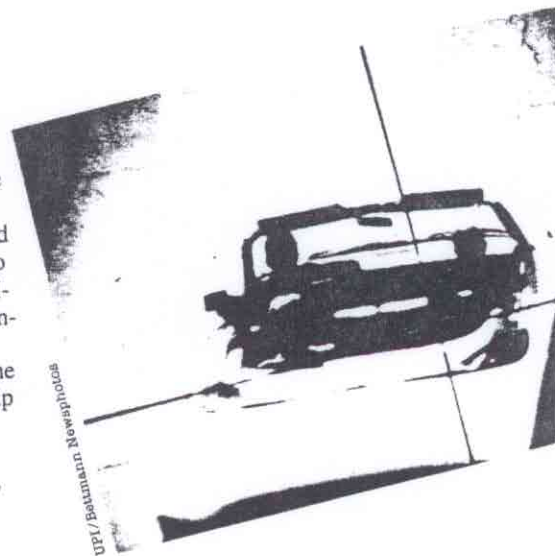
Oswald was rushed to Parkland Hospital and was treated by some of the doctors who'd tried to save the president. He died at 1:07 p.m.—48 hours and 7 minutes after Kennedy.

Ruby was subsequently tried for murder, convicted and sentenced to death. He won a new trial but later died of cancer. He never wavered from his contention that he acted alone; drawn by curiosity, he said, he entered the jail basement and, "on impulse and the purest of chance, shot . . . Oswald."

In the 25 years since those events, there has been disagreement and controversy over nearly everything seen, heard, said and written about the assassination.

A week after the Dallas tragedy, President Johnson created a commission to look into the deaths of Kennedy and Oswald. It was headed by Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren and included six other prominent Americans, including future president Gerald R. Ford.

On September 24, 1964, the Warren Commission presented an 888-page report to Johnson, and four days later it was released to the public. After looking at 3,154



exhibits and studying the testimony of 552 witnesses, the commission found: "The shots which killed President Kennedy and wounded Governor Connally were fired by Lee Harvey Oswald." It also concluded that "Oswald acted alone," that he "killed Dallas Police Patrolman J.D. Tippit," and that there was "no evidence that either Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby was part of any conspiracy, domestic or foreign, to assassinate President Kennedy." There was "no direct or indirect relationship" between Oswald and Ruby, the commission report added.

It also concluded that (1) the shots that killed Kennedy and wounded Connally were fired from the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository and not from "any other location" and (2) three shots were fired—two hitting and killing the president and one missing the president's car—and "the same bullet which pierced the president's throat also caused Governor Connally's wounds."

The commission's report was later bolstered with the publication of its hearings: 26 supplementary volumes of testimony and exhibits on which it based its findings. As Charles Roberts, a respected member of the White House Press Corps at the time, wrote, "Functioning as a fact-finding body rather than a court of law," the commission "explored more theories, tracked down more leads, and listened to more rambling witnesses, expert and illiterate, than any body of its kind in history."

Pierre Salinger agreed with Roberts, and added, "It is the very thoroughness of the Warren Commission that has caused its problems. It listened patiently to everyone, no matter how credible or incredible the testimony. It then appended all this testimony to its report, providing an opportunity to anyone with a typewriter and a lot of time on his hands to write a book."

The Warren Commission's report at first was hailed both at home and abroad for what *The New York Times* called "a comprehensive and convincing account of the circumstances of President Kennedy's assassination." *The Times* added, "Readers

of the full report will find no basis for questioning the commission's conclusions that President Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone."

Within two years, however, opinion about the report had changed. In the fall of 1966, both the Gallup and Harris public opinion polls disclosed that nearly two-thirds of the American people doubted the commission's conclusion that Oswald was the sole assassin. This public skepticism has continued ever since: The *Washington Post* reported in November 1983 that four out of five Americans did not believe the Warren Commission's version of Kennedy's assassination.

This doubt can be attributed in part to the widely-held belief that the assassination was too monstrous a crime to have been committed by one person named Oswald. "For many people," wrote Salinger, "it is simply not within the realm of belief that this man of grace and ability could be taken from the world by a mindless psychopath."

The doubts can be attributed in part to what Americans learned about their government in the 1960s and '70s, when the Vietnam War and Watergate made many doubt the veracity and motives of high government officials. "Implicit in this skepticism," wrote Henry Hurt in his 1985 study of the assassination, *Reasonable Doubt*, "is a feeling that the public has been deceived by those vested with the special trust to conduct national affairs out of the sight and reach of the ordinary citizenry."

But doubts about the Warren Report can be attributed in larger measure to an outpouring of books and essays, beginning even before the commission had submitted its report and continuing ever since, that challenged and criticized virtually everything in the report and put forth different versions of the assassination. "A whole army of sleuths," according to one observer, "had taken upon itself, some out of honest misgivings, others for fun and profit, the task of demolishing the Commission and its conclusions."

Few Americans, including many of the critics themselves, have actually read and digested the 888-page Warren Commission Report or its 26 supplementary volumes of supporting evidence. Thus the report's critics have had a relatively easy time creating doubts and suspicion.

If one does read and study all of the volumes put out by the commission, one will find that most of the questions about the assassination that were answerable were answered. Where no absolute answers were possible, the commission avoided categorical statements. Instead, for example, it said about the number of shots fired, "the weight of the evidence indicates that there were three shots fired," that the evidence was "very persuasive," that the same bullet that pierced Kennedy's throat also wounded Connally, and that it could find "no evi-

dence" that Oswald was part of any conspiracy.

This is not to say the Warren Commission is above criticism. But as one observer has noted, "If the critics are judged against the same impossibly high standards of evidence that they apply to the Warren Commission, the critics' own efforts become as elusive as a fistful of water." While the critics have maligned the Warren Commission, they've used its report as the main source for their own books attacking it. Yet they've provided little in the way of a credible alternative to the commission's conclusions.

In rejecting the commission findings, critics put forth numerous theories about the assassination. A sampling provides some idea of their range and, in many cases, their improbability: A Texas oil millionaire ordered the deaths of Kennedy and Khrushchev to gain control of the world oil market; Kennedy was killed by Southern racists; Oswald was a fall guy for reactionary interests, including, variously, FBI, CIA and Army types; an unknown assassin fired at Kennedy from a manhole (since filled in) on the grassy knoll and escaped through a storm sewer; an assassin fired from a papier-mache tree built especially for the occasion and later removed; the Warren Commission deliberately suppressed and distorted evidence to fit a preconceived verdict that Oswald acted alone.

One critic, Harold Weisberg in *Whitewash* (1966), seemed unwilling to believe anything in the report except the page numbers. With such a wave of anti-Warren Commission publications appearing so soon after the report was written, it's not difficult to understand why many Americans, with little knowledge of the commission document, began to doubt its conclusions.

There's been no let-up in the criticism of the commission or in the publication of new assassination theories. If you disbelieve that Oswald is the sole assassin, then you can choose assassins and conspirators from the Russians, the Castro people, dissident elements of the FBI and CIA (with Oswald as agent for all of them), the Teamsters with Mafia pals, Texas right-wingers acting for God and country, the anti-Castro people incensed over the failure of the Bay of Pigs venture, the Minutemen, the Klan, the Dal-

las police force, New Orleans homosexuals connected with organized crime or the CIA, a professional assassin who was a contract killer for the CIA, or a Russian KGB agent posing as Oswald.

Henry Hurt's study, *Reasonable Doubt*, and a 1982 scholarly account by Michael L. Kurtz, *Crime of the Century*, have added to the residue of uncertainty in people's minds by the conclusions they reached. According to Kurtz, "The evidence clearly . . . demonstrates that John Kennedy was killed as a result of a conspiracy and that, intentionally or unintentionally, the federal government assisted in concealing proof of that conspiracy." Hurt contends, "A powerful case can be made that Oswald did not kill Kennedy. The answer as to who did is as beclouded as ever."

Many thought or hoped that the Zapruder film record of the assassination would put an end to a number of controversies about it. But Kennedy was behind a road sign, out of Zapruder's sight, when he was first hit, so the exact location and time of the first shot was not recorded in Zapruder's frames 206-225. (The film passed through the camera at 18.3 frames a second, providing both a visual record and a clock of the assassination.) No one, including the Warren Commission or the independent investigators, has been able to determine precisely what happened at the outset. In frame 206 the president vanishes behind the sign; when he emerges in frame 225, about a second later, his face is distorted, and his right hand is rising toward his neck. By frame 230, just .27 of a second after coming into view, Kennedy's shoulders are hunched and both hands are at his throat, a position he remains in until the end of the sequence in frame 244.

It's not possible here to deal with the assassination controversies in detail. But two of the endlessly disputed matters can be examined to some extent: Whether a gunman could've fired three shots within the time listed by the Warren Commission, "from approximately 4.8 to in excess of 7 seconds," and whether a gunman from the sixth floor of the Book Depository could have hit his slow-moving target.

Critics generally say no to the first matter to support their theory of a second gunman.



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But Oswald's rifle could be fired as rapidly as 2.3 seconds between shots. When fired three times, the first shot begins the timing sequence, and only the two subsequent shots are counted. Even critic Kurtz admits that an amateur could have fired three shots in the 4.8 to 7 second time span.

Critics say that shooting Kennedy from the sixth floor of the depository would be almost impossible—that no one since has been able to duplicate it in a test. It's true the distance for the first shot was 175 feet, but with a four-power telescopic sight Kennedy would appear to the gunman to be only 45 feet away. For the fatal shot the president was 265 feet away from the window—but apparently only 66 feet away through the telescopic sight. The limousine, moreover, moving at 11.2 miles per hour on a down-grade, was in almost straight alignment with the assassin's rifle.

Four marksmanship experts from the Marine Corps, the Army and the FBI all testified before the commission that the shots which struck the president were "not . . . particularly difficult." According to their testimony, the alignment of Elm Street with the depository was "a definite advantage to the shooter, the vehicle moving directly away from him. . . ." Kennedy thus became an almost stationary target for someone aiming from an elevated spot in the depository.

Writers Kurtz and Hurt both dispute the commission's determination that "Oswald possessed the capability with a rifle that enabled him to commit the assassination." They maintain that in marksmanship tests conducted for the commission, expert sharpshooters failed in their efforts to duplicate Oswald's marksmanship. However, a close reading of the Warren report shows a variance between its account of the marksmanship tests and the version of that account by such critics as Hurt and Kurtz. According to the Warren report, three marksmen, rated as master by the National Rifle Association and using Oswald's rifle with the telescopic sight, each fired two series of three shots from a tower at three silhouette targets positioned at distances corresponding to Zapruder's film: 175 feet, 240 feet and 265 feet. They succeeded two out of six times in getting off three shots in less than 6 seconds (4.6 and 5.1) and twice more in getting three shots off in less than 7 seconds (6.45 and 6.75). "None of the marksmen had any practice with the assassination weapon except for exercising the bolt for 2 or 3 minutes on a dry run," the report noted.

The report continues, ". . . one of the firers in the rapid fire test, in firing his two series of three shots, hit the target twice within a span of 4.6 and 5.1 seconds. The others would have been able to reduce their times if they had been given the opportunity to become familiar with the movement of the bolt and the trigger pull." The fact that Oswald had engaged in such practice was confirmed by his widow, Marina: ". . . in

New Orleans in May of 1963, she observed Oswald sitting with the rifle on their screened porch at night, sighting with the telescopic lens and operating the bolt," the Warren report notes.

"The various tests showed that the Mannlicher-Carcano was an accurate rifle and that the use of a four-power scope was a substantial aid to rapid, accurate firing," concluded the commission. "Oswald's Marine training in marksmanship, his other rifle experience (hunting with a bolt-action rifle), and his established familiarity with this particular weapon show that he possessed ample capability to commit the assassination."

In 1975, a commission headed by Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller, formed to investigate domestic activities by the CIA, re-examined some of the assassination material and confirmed the Warren Commission's findings. "There is no evidence that more than one gunman was involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy," the Rockefeller Commission reported.

Finally, a House Select Committee on Assassinations was created in September 1976 to investigate the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King. In March 1979, the committee issued a 686-page report, supplemented by 12 volumes of hearings and appendices. The committee agreed with the Warren Commission report on one main conclusion: Lee Harvey Oswald killed John F. Kennedy. It absolved the CIA, FBI and the Secret Service of any involvement in Kennedy's assassination. It found that the Warren Commission arrived at its conclusions in good faith but faulted the commission for failing to investigate adequately the matter of a conspiracy. The House Committee attributed this deficiency in part to the failure of the commission to receive all relevant information possessed by other agencies.

But the House Committee concluded, "Scientific acoustical evidence establishes a high probability that two gunmen fired at President John F. Kennedy," a statement that led to the further conclusion that Kennedy "was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy," though the committee was "unable to identify the other gunman or the extent of the conspiracy." In reaching this conclusion, the committee had changed its preliminary finding that "there is insufficient evidence to find that there was a conspiracy."

The committee apparently changed its conclusion based on acoustical evidence. In the final weeks of its hearings, it heard testimony about a Dallas police Dictabelt which contained a recording made the day of the assassination. It supposedly originated from a police motorcycle at Dealey Plaza whose microphone was stuck on the "transmit" position during the period when Kennedy was shot. Experts studying the impulses on the tape concluded that there was a 95 percent probability of a fourth shot fired at Kennedy from the grassy knoll. This astonishing evidence convinced the committee to

reverse both the Warren Commission's view and its own initial position regarding the conspiracy theory.

The acoustical evidence, however, fails to hold up. Immediately after the shots, the motorcade accelerated sharply and police sirens started blaring. Yet the recording contains no sudden sound of motorcycles revving up, no sudden sound of police sirens screeching. Sirens are not heard on the tape until about two minutes after the sounds the acoustical experts claim are the shots of the second gunman. When sirens finally are heard, they seem to be approaching, cresting and then receding.

In December 1980, the FBI said its laboratory analysis of the acoustical evidence lent no support to the theory of a second gunman. According to the FBI report, the House Committee's scientific consultants had not proved that the sounds on the recording originated in Dealey Plaza or even that they represented the sounds of gunshots.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations, while concluding—based on faulty evidence—that a conspiracy "probably" existed, was nonetheless forced to report that it had no idea who the conspirators, if any, might have been. Thus the resurgence of conspiracy theories is all the more remarkable because not a single fact linking Oswald to anyone else in a plot has become known in the 24 years since the Warren Commission issued its report.

To believe the conspiracy theory also means believing that all the following people were parties to a widespread effort to suppress information: Warren Commission members; the commission staff; the assassinated president's brother Robert; the president's successor in office, Lyndon Johnson; and the FBI, CIA, Secret Service and Dallas police force. And one would have to discount the material in the 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Hearings, the testimony of ballistic experts and eyewitnesses, and the evidence of Oswald's fingerprints.

One also would have to ponder why, during the quarter century since the assassination, there have been no breaks in the ranks of the alleged conspirators and no death-bed confessions that divulged some of the details and names of the conspiracy. The dissenters and critics ask Americans to disbelieve overwhelming evidence of Oswald acting alone, then they ask them to believe non-existing evidence of a conspiracy.

No gunman or gunmen firing that November day in 1963 in Dealey Plaza, except Oswald, have been identified or accused. No guns except Oswald's Mannlicher-Carcano rifle have been connected with the shooting. No bullets other than those from Oswald's rifle have been found and tied ballistically to the assassin. And there have been no confessions of complicity. The overall record shows beyond a reasonable doubt that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed John Kennedy. □